CALIFORNIA'S FIRE CHIEFS: BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE

by

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DEDICATION

It has been with a gentle hand, soft reminders, loving understanding, endless patience, active listening, and constant encouragement that this study has been accomplished. For these acts of love and kindness, I dedicate this Dissertation to my wife, Terri. May all who come to this be as blessed as I.

To those firefighters who strive to become leaders and to those who already struggle with the challenge, I hope some of the ideas that follow will aid in your efforts.

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ABSTRACT

The purposes of this study are to determine what fire chiefs from selected departments across California identify are the leading problems they face; relay the measures of effectiveness these chiefs value as significant; and categorize the collective advice of nearly one-hundred senior active fire officers on what a fire chief assuming command of a department should do to become a more effective chief. Then, this research examines the relationships between fire chief characteristics and the leadership dimensions of mission accomplishment, empowerment, relationship, team building, and personal character. (Gilbert, Hannan, and Flaggert, 2000). Finally, this work tests fire chiefs' effectiveness scores compared to measures of organizational productivity.

This study uses descriptive and correlation research methods. Data was collected by using thirteen site visits and meeting with department fire chiefs and their senior staff. Nineteen departments submitted a Leadership Effectiveness Assessment (LEA) yielding one-hundred thirty-eight respondents. The LEA evaluated the chiefs in five main leadership behaviors and thirteen subcategories using subordinate ratings. The survey results were tested using cross-tabulation statistics to determine relationships between LEA behavior factors and ratings of subordinate productivity and select leader characteristics. Significant LEA factors were

also tested against the department's per capita spending and the rate of fire in the community to identify significant relationships.

By examining the interview data using a five frames leadership taxonomy (Human Resource, Symbolic, Structural, Political, and Performance) five areas for leadership improvement and activity surfaced. These areas include leader self-development, leadership approach, department member development, organizational development, and the department's leadership role in the community. These areas seem to arise naturally out of the theoretical bases provided in Leader/Member Exchange theory, Transactional Leadership theory, and Transformational Leadership theory; their common element being the presence of effective and mutually satisfying relationships which achieve common goals.